

**EDWARD CRACROFT LEFROY: HIS
LIFE AND POEMS INCLUDING A
REPRINT OF ECHOES FROM
THEOCRITUS. PP. 1-198**

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Edward Cracroft Lefroy

Edward Cracroft Lefroy
His Life and Poems including a
Reprint of Echoes from Theocritus

By Wilfred Austin Gill

With a Critical Estimate
of the Sonnets by the late
John Addington Symonds

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PREFACE

THIS little book calls for a few lines of justification. In 1885 the Rev. Edward Cracroft Lefroy published a volume of one hundred Sonnets ("Echoes from Theocritus and other Sonnets," Elliot Stock) in which literary critics at once recognised the true ring of poetry. Lefroy died in 1891 at the age of thirty-six. Shortly after his death, the late Mr. John Addington Symonds lighted upon this volume in one of the batches of books which were periodically sent out to him from England to his winter home in the Engadine. He instinctively singled it out as the production of a genuine poet. In a correspondence which ensued he repeatedly expressed to me his desire that these Sonnets should not be allowed to die. The book is now out of print, and Symonds's high estimate of Lefroy's work, even were it not endorsed by that of other competent authorities, would seem to furnish sufficient ground for the reprinting of the Sonnets.

But the personal side of Lefroy is seen only indistinctly through his poems. When I had told him something of the man and his conversation, Symonds intuitively perceived that "his life philosophy was even more noteworthy than his verse." In order, therefore, to bring the *complete* personality of Lefroy into clearer light, I gladly acceded to Symonds's suggestion that we should write a joint-memoir, he supplying a

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critical appreciation of the poems, and I contributing the personal side which friendship from boyhood had rendered familiar to me.

The execution of our design was unfortunately frustrated by Symonds's death. He wrote, however, what he called a "first effort," which appeared in the *New Review* of March 1892, and subsequently, with some additions, in "In the Key of Blue." By the kind permission of Mr. Elkin Mathews, the publisher, and of Mr. Horatio Brown, Symonds's literary executor, this essay is now substantially reproduced in the appendix.

The estimate, even as it stands, is a valuable testimony to Lefroy's genius, but one must deeply regret that Symonds did not live to bring out in fuller detail his general sympathy—in spite of some vital points of divergence—with Lefroy's religious, Hellenic, and poetical temperament.

Left to complete the memoir alone, I have attempted to pay a simple tribute of affection to a gifted friend, from whom I have learned much, and others may care to learn something.

One word of warning. Those who hold that a biography, to be of any interest, must be either a record of striking personal doings, or a mine of epistolary gossip between men of mark, will find little to detain them in this volume.

It mainly consists of suggestions offered by a man of candid and cultivated mind upon many subjects of general interest—not least in the present day—subjects which most men have not the patience to think out, or in some cases the courage to face. The peculiar merit of Lefroy's opinions lies, I think, in their being at once liberal and definite.

An apology is due to the personal friends of Lefroy for the delay—owing to pressure of other work—in

the publication of this memoir. But since it contains little that concerns current events, I believe that such interest as the book may possess will not be affected by the lateness of its appearance.

A selection from Lefroy's Lyrical poems now appears for the first time in a collected form. In Chapter III. (pp. 46, 47) I have stated his reasons for neglecting this kind of versification. Many of his Lyrics were left in the rough, and it would therefore be unfair to judge him by these, but they deserve a place among his literary remains if only to illustrate other sides of his temperament.

Of the thirty new Sonnets now printed, some have already appeared in a fugitive form: some of the rest derive an interest from the date of their composition—the year of his death.

I have given the names of Lefroy's correspondents only in the case of letters addressed *to* him. Where the letters are written *by* him, their importance depends but slightly, if at all, upon the personality of the recipient.

The headings to each chapter and the quotation which closes the memoir are taken from Lefroy's diaries. They are very characteristic of the man.

I have to thank several of Lefroy's friends for the loan of his letters, especially Mr. Edward C. Price, to whom I am also indebted for looking over the MS. of the memoir and making some suggestions which I have gladly adopted.

W. A. G.

MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,

Oct. 28, 1896.

